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ECHO.....

Israeli study uncovers health needs of trafficked female prostitutes



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An exploratory study of women working in Israeli brothels, their self reported health problems, status, and working conditions has policy implications for other countries where illegal immigrant women are trafficked for prostitution. These disadvantaged women urgently need outreach services to satisfy their unmet health needs.

The researchers interviewed 55 volunteers aged 18–38 years working in brothels in Tel Aviv, Beer-Sheva, and Eilat and established baseline detailed demographic and working profiles during a private, questionnaire based, one to one interview.

They found that 82% of brothel workers in three Israeli cities were illegally trafficked women. Most were working up to 12 hours a day, seven days a week, seeing an estimated 200–300 clients a month—up to twice the number in similar studies. A third had high scores for risk factors such as urinary or sexually transmitted infections likely to increase occupational health risk, index though these did not match recent health visits, which are commonly controlled by brothel owners. Stepwise regression showed age <18 at first sexual encounter, suicidal thoughts in the past, hours of work per day, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as important variables, and in a final overall regression number of work hours and PTSD were significant. The few women who were legal immigrants—with access to health care—had slightly better health.

Israel's sex industry is now a high volume business dominated by illegal immigrant women trafficked mainly from the former Soviet Union to work in brothels, where they are more at risk of poor health, violence, and trauma. Understanding their circumstances is crucial to drawing up a healthcare policy for them.

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